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Three abductors of Marine caught

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) — The main Shiite Moslem militia has caught three gunmen who kidnapped a U.S. Marine officer serving with the United Nations, but not the mastermind of the abduction, security sources said Tuesday.

The United Nations has approached Iran, Syria and the Palestine Liberation Organization, which has influence in Lebanon, seeking help in the search for Lt. Col. William R. Higgins, U.N. spokesman Mario Zamorano said in New York. Zamorano said the contacts were made by Undersecretary-General Arrack Goulding, who was in the region when Higgins was kidnapped last Wednesday. The 43-year-old Marine from Danville, Ky., is a decorated Vietnam veteran and was an aide to former U.S. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger.

The relatively moderate Shiite militia Amal has seized 42 suspects in a

clampdown on Shiite fundamentalists since Higgins was abducted near Tyre, 50 miles south of Beirut, an Amal spokesman said on condition of anonymity.

Amal has been the dominant force in predominantly Shiite south Lebanon but is being challenged by Hezbollah, which is loyal to Iran and believed to be an umbrella for Shiite radical groups that hold most of the 25 foreigners missing in Lebanon.

Nine Americans now are among the missing foreigners. The hostage held longest is Terry A. Anderson, chief Middle East correspondent of the Associated Press, kidnapped March 16, 1985.

A security source, who also would not let his name be used, said those rounded up by Amal include "the three gunmen who seized Col. Higgins and forced him into the first getaway car."

Three other Shiites held by Amal

monitored Higgins' movements before his abduction, sources reported.

According to the reports, Amal questioned the suspects but found they did not know the whereabouts of Higgins or the man who planned the operation.

Their leader kept his men in the dark, one source said, and "the operation was a masterpiece from a professional standpoint."

"The mastermind used five identical brown Volvo cars plus two additional getaway cars, a white Peugeot and a red Mercedes, in the abduction," he said. "The squads in each car did not know who was in the other cars."

A group calling itself the Organization of the Oppressed on Earth said it abducted Higgins and claimed he was a spy for the "satanic CIA." The U.S. government denied the accusation.



Photo by Gary Bean

Sneaky snake

Temina, an animal science major, plays with her pet snake, Ayce, in front of the Academic Building. Jenny Palter, a journalism major and owner of her own snake, looks on.

GSU must absorb half of plant cost, commission rules

AUSTIN (AP) — Gulf States Utilities' customers should pay only about half of the \$3.1 billion the company spent to build its River Bend nuclear power plant, the Public Utility Commission ruled Tuesday.

In a 2-1 decision, the commission decided the Beaumont-based utility had failed to prove the prudence of \$1.5 billion in construction costs.

"The company simply failed on its burden of proof," Commissioner Jo Campbell said. "They had ample opportunity. They spent money on top of money trying to prove their case."

GSU will get to spend more money to try to prove its case. The commission's decision allows GSU to ask for the \$1.5 billion in disallowed costs at a subsequent PUC hearing. That upset Assistant Attorney General Scott McCollough, representing state agencies served by GSU.

"At some point we are going to quit litigating this issue and make a final decision," he said.

The nuclear plant decision came as the commission began a series of votes that will decide new rates for GSU, which requested in November 1986 a \$144 million rate increase.

After hearing 129 days of testimony, PUC examiners recommended an \$86.7 million increase, including a \$39.9 million emergency increase granted the financially troubled company last April.

The decision-making process

continues. A hearing was set for today to hear testimony about expenses incurred by GSU as a result of the rate case.

The commission also approved a 13 percent return on equity, down from the 15.25 percent sought by GSU.

PUC Chairman Dennis Thomas said the dollar effect of the Tuesday decisions on GSU rates would not be calculated until later this week. He estimated it would add up to a rate increase less than the \$86.7 million recommended by the examiners.

The Tuesday meeting opened with a survival plea from E. Linn Draper, GSU's chief executive officer.

"I believe the River Bend nuclear plant was a good decision at the time it was made," Draper said. "It has been in service for two years. It has operated effectively."

"I would just encourage you that in this mass of testimony you have heard that you keep in mind the big picture, that our company's survival really is at stake."

GSU owns a 70 percent share of River Bend, which serves its customers in Texas and Louisiana. The plant's total cost, including the share owned by Cajun Electric Power Cooperative, was \$4.5 billion. The GSU rate case is the first in which the PUC will determine the prudence of nuclear plant construction costs.

Thomas was the dissenter in the 2-1 vote on River Bend costs.

Federal judge: Occidental Chemical responsible for Love Canal cleanup

NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y. (AP) — A federal judge ruled Tuesday that Occidental Chemical Corp. is liable for the cost — estimated at more than \$250 million — of cleaning up the Love Canal landfill that became synonymous with environmental disaster.

After nine years of deliberations, U.S. District Judge John Curtin said Occidental produced the wastes that created the disaster and stored them in a way that would eventually result in toxic leakage.

"It is beyond dispute that OCC's disposal practices were at least partially responsible for the release, or threatened release, of the chemicals from the Love Canal landfill," Curtin said.

Curtin said Occidental's liability would be determined in further court proceedings involving claims

against Occidental by other parties, including the state of New York and some residents.

Occidental spokesman James Green said the company was disappointed by the ruling and would not comment on its plans until its attorneys had a chance to study Curtin's 36-page decision.

"At last somebody has been assigned some responsibility," said Sister Marjeen Hoffmann, director of the Ecumenical Task Force which has been an advocate for people in the Love Canal neighborhood.

Curtin's ruling upholds the federal Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980, which the judge said was designed to compel the waste disposal industry "to correct its past mistakes and to provide a solution

for the dangers posed by inactive abandoned waste sites."

The law was passed 27 years after Occidental yielded ownership of the landfill, transferring it to the Niagara Falls School Board.

Occidental, formerly Hooker Chemical and Plastic Co., contended that it was not responsible for the site after 1953 when it sold the property to the school board, which built a school on the grounds.

Occidental said the construction broke a clay seal on the dump and allowed the chemicals to leak into the environment. The company acknowledged dumping 20,000 tons of chemical wastes into the canal during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Martin Littlefield, assistant U.S. attorney for the Buffalo district, said the decision was "a great victory for the state because it means companies

are indeed responsible for what they've done in years past."

Littlefield said Occidental would be liable for the "bottom line" on the cleanup costs. He said, however, the ruling allows Occidental to sue other parties the chemical giant contends should share the responsibility.

Nunzio Loverdi, president of the Love Canal Environmental Action Committee, said, "I think Occidental should accept the decision and not take action against the city and School Board because if it does we will all suffer. We want to get on with our lives and put this behind us."

Ten years ago, Love Canal became synonymous with environmental disaster when state officials ordered an evacuation of children and pregnant women from the area because of leaking chemicals.

Reagan chooses nominee for secretary of Navy position

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Reagan on Tuesday picked a veteran Capitol Hill fighter, William L. Ball III, to step into a simmering dispute over Pentagon budget cuts as his new secretary of the Navy.

The White House said the president will nominate Ball, a former Capitol Hill aide who has been chief lobbyist for both the State Department and the White House, to succeed James Webb, who resigned as

Navy secretary on Monday with a blast at Secretary of Defense Frank C. Carlucci.

"We look to Will Ball to continue working aggressively for a strong U.S. Navy," White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said, noting Webb's charge that Carlucci had needlessly sacrificed the administration's goal of a 600-ship fleet.

Fitzwater said the administration still seeks a 600-vessel Navy, but now expects the goal to be reached in fis-

cal year 1992, instead of in fiscal 1989 as originally planned.

Ball, 40, a soft-spoken Southerner who came to Washington as an aide to former Sen. Herman Talmadge, D-Ga., has a reputation for skill at behind-the-scenes compromises and maneuvers needed to steer legislation through Congress.

Ball has been assistant to the president for legislative affairs since February 1986. Before that he had been assistant secretary of state for legislative and intergovernmental affairs.

Space researchers attend conference at A&M

By Jeff Pollard
Staff Writer

With the space shuttle Challenger disaster of 1986 slowly fading into the past, researchers are busy working on the necessary technology that will help NASA achieve future mission goals and take the space program into the 21st century. Many of those researchers were at Texas A&M Monday and Tuesday for the Controlled Environmental Life Support Systems (CELSS) Research Conference.

Sponsored by the Space Research Center at A&M, the conference was meant to bring together researchers with varying backgrounds and give them an overview of current research going on at the interdisciplinary level.

Oran Nicks, director of the Space Research Center, told participants that it was up to university researchers, under the direction of NASA, to do the basic research, and industry must take these developments and put them to practical use.

"Universities are best suited for the research because they are on the cutting edge of science where all of the changes occur," Nicks said. "They can dream and be creative and even make mistakes without the outcomes causing any great damage."

Nicks said NASA had fallen into a dormant period when research was

de-emphasized and allowed to deteriorate. He said universities had fallen into a survival mode and were just now starting to pull out.

"We're in the dawning of a new space age," Nicks said. "We're looking past just a space station to return trips to the moon and a manned mission to Mars."

Government officials from NASA to President Reagan's office have recognized the need to expand U.S. commitment in space and have established programs to meet this need. In the budget submitted to and recently approved by the President's Office of Management and Budget, NASA set aside \$100 million dollars in 1989 and over \$1 billion through 1993 for the Pathfinder Initiative to be run by the Office of Aeronautics and Space Technology (OAST) at NASA.

Peggy L. Evanich, program director in the propulsion, power and energy division of OAST and keynote speaker at the conference, explained that Pathfinder is a technology development program that will focus on human survival in space for extended time periods.

"With the renewed interest in a lunar base and a mission to Mars," Evanich said, "Pathfinder will focus on producing deliverable technology within the next five years, giving officials the information needed to de-

cide on the next mission beyond the space station."

Part of the Pathfinder Initiative will be devoted to the development of life support systems and the integration of CELSS research already under way. Evanich said the end product will be a life support system that operates independently and combines chemical/physical processes with biological processes to form a man-made biosphere.

She said a new system of technology development is required to reach Pathfinder goals. The system should begin with a computer process simulation, proceed through subsystem and system development and then go through laboratory validation before the technology is ready to be used.

"We're not looking to build hardware through Pathfinder that is going to be obsolete before it can be used," Evanich said. "We want to have the technology ready when these things that we're talking about, like a lunar base, are ready to be done."

The rest of the two-day conference was made up of paper presentations by academic and NASA researchers from across the country. Primary emphasis was on biologically based systems, with a secondary

emphasis on physical/chemical processes and system modeling.

Dr. Kamel H. Fotouh, chairman of the chemical engineering department at Prairie View A&M University, presented his senior class's project — Production of Breathable Air on Mars. Fotouh said that his students designed systems to remove solid particles from the Martian air, convert the Martian air into breathable air and to search for possible underground water pockets to be used in the production of air. They also made a general time line for the establishment of a Mars base.

"The establishment of a Mars colony will involve three phases: A survival stage, when the primary concern will be with air, water and food; A self-sufficiency phase, when chemicals, fuels, pharmaceuticals, polymers and metals are produced; and a production and export phase, when items such as enzymes, crystals and radiation resistant materials will be sent back to Earth."

Fotouh suggested that we know how to get to Mars but we do not know how to stay there longer. "Everyone has their own definition of a design but each thinks that his is the best," he said. "We must combine our designs to get 100 percent effectiveness."

Other papers involved the use of

plants and plant growth in a contained environment. Plants are a big part of the biological life-support system idea. They act as an oxygen producer and as a source of food and comfort on long missions.

Alice Eichold, a NASA Graduate Student Research Fellow from Yale University, reasons that if you expect a human to take on an 18 to 36 month space flight you must build the spacecraft from the inside-out, putting flight crew comfort and convenience above outer structure.

"By creating a plant growth facility with human interaction capabilities, the plants act as a psychological boost to the crew," Eichold said. "The plants benefit the humans and the humans, at the same time, benefit the plants."

Clearly, it will require a combination of physical/chemical systems and biological systems to create a closed-loop life support system that can be used over a long period of time, and the research will take time.

"We hope to have both a closed-loop physical/chemical process and a closed-loop biological process designed by 1994," Evanich said. "Then we can integrate the two and have a physical/chemical/biological process that we can test in the space station by 1998."

Professor dies after heart attack

Abdel Ayoub, a 60-year-old electrical engineering professor who had been at Texas A&M for 20 years, died Saturday of a heart attack.

Ayoub was in the emergency room of St. Joseph hospital when the attack occurred. His wife, Odessa, said Ayoub was taken to the hospital because of a chest pain but, she said, there was no indication of a heart problem until the attack occurred. Mrs. Ayoub said doctors examined her husband and initially found nothing wrong, but Ayoub had the fatal heart attack after the examination, while he was still in the hospital. Mrs. Ayoub said her husband had suffered from a heart problem for five years.

This semester, Ayoub was teaching an electrical circuit theory class, a course he taught for the past three semesters. The electrical engineering class is required for all electrical engineering and nuclear engineering majors.

Chanan Singh, an electrical engineering professor and friend of Ayoub's, said Ayoub was also involved with research in power systems reliability and electrical machines. His specialization was power systems, Singh said.

Singh said Ayoub always seemed to enjoy spending his time with students.

"He really liked to work with students and he cared about them," Singh said. "He was a nice person."

Eric Gustafson, a senior electrical engineering major who took Ayoub's class, said Ayoub played an important role in many students' academic careers.

"He had a lot of influence in their curricula and education," Gustafson said. "He influenced a lot of people's decisions."

Funeral services were held in College Station and he was buried at a Moslem cemetery in Houston Sunday.

Ayoub is survived by his wife and sons who live in Houston.